

Fifth Street parking decision delayed

By Diane Rietman
Journal Staff Writer

5/8

A decision on where parking will be banned along Fifth Street during the two-year reconstruction of

Rapid City Omaha Street was delayed after more business owners questioned the city's plan. They have asked the Rapid City Council to modify the plan and delay its implementation as long as possible.

The parking would be removed to provide an additional lane for traffic flow, particularly a second left-turn lane for drivers headed north on Fifth Street and turning west onto Main Street.

City officials initially wanted to do away with parking on the east side of Fifth Street between Quincy and Omaha streets. Last week, the city's Public Works Committee recommended exempting the block between Kansas City and Quincy streets from the parking restrictions after business owners near that intersection said they couldn't afford to lose the parking. No official action was taken on that recommendation.

Gary Christensen of Rushmore Realty and Lenny Iwan of Budget Signs told city council members recently that



Don Polovich/Journal staff

Doug Adelman monitors traffic on Fifth Street between Main and St. Joseph streets. Rapid City officials are trying to decide the best way to eliminate some parking on Fifth Street to provide an extra traffic lane during construction of Omaha Street.

business had dropped when parking was eliminated as part of Fifth Street reconstruction slightly more than a year ago. The business owners said they couldn't afford to lose business again because of

restricted parking.

On Monday night, more business owners expressed concern about the proposal.

"Parking is so central to downtown. The loss of four or five spots is a lot when you're

that short of spaces," said Jerry Freed, one of the owners of Furniture Mart, on the corner of Fifth and Main streets.

Diane Alberts, also a co-owner of Furniture Mart, said: "Three parking spaces were

eliminated when the right-turn lane was put in. We're not happy with that."

Freed expressed concern for other nearby businesses. He said that people park at Firestone Tire and Service Center to visit Lincare Medical Supply and other businesses in the block between St. Joseph and Main streets. Many of those people are on oxygen and need that parking restored, Freed said.

Alderman Rick Kriebel suggested that parking not be removed between Main and Omaha streets because traffic would be reduced in the area after Omaha Street is closed between Third and Sixth streets, starting in April 2004.

Doug Adelman, the city's traffic engineer, said one of the main reasons the city wants to remove parking along Fifth Street is to provide dual left-turn lanes at the intersection of Fifth and Main streets. He is conducting a traffic study this week to see what problems currently exist for traffic making the left turn at Main Street and lining up as far back as the intersection of Fifth and St. Joseph streets. He will provide that information to the city's Public Works Committee so members can decide to what extent parking will be removed and when the parking ban

along Fifth Street should begin.

"We're expecting more left-hand turns in April 2004, when Omaha Street is closed between Third and Sixth streets. But we'll start seeing some changes this summer. That's why we're out there looking at the traffic flow to see what the problem is now," Adelman said. "They want to know when we really need to eliminate the parking because the business owners have said it's a hardship for them."

For now, the worst times are between 7:30 a.m. and 8 a.m. and between 4:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. During those times, stopped traffic extends back to the intersection of Fifth and St. Joseph streets.

It will only get worse in the next few weeks, as tourists start arriving with RVs, Adelman said. And the parking problem will worsen when additional downtown parking is lost during construction at the Pennington County Courthouse complex. About 200 parking spaces will be lost in the jail parking lot as well as on Second Street, which will be closed to traffic during construction, county officials said.

Contact Diane Rietman at 394-8418 or diane.rietman@rapidcityjournal.com